

Remarks

By the present amendment, claims 1, 10, 14, 30, 38, and 40 have been amended to more clearly define the claimed invention and to maintain proper dependencies. Claims 19-26, 34-35, 37, and 42-47 have been withdrawn. Claims 2-4, 7-9, 15, 18, and 29 have been canceled, without prejudice or disclaimer. Accordingly, claims 1, 5-6, 10-14, 16-17, 27-28, 30-33, 36, 38-41, and 48 are under active prosecution in the present application. It is believed and intended that no new matter has been added by this amendment. Reconsideration and allowance of all pending claims are respectfully requested in view of the following remarks.

I. Claim Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. § 103

Claims 1, 5, 27-28, 36, 38-41, and 48 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 5,884,706, issued March 23, 1999 to Jeffrey Charles Edwards (hereafter referenced as "the '706 patent") in view of U.S. Patent No. 4,519,576, issued May 28, 1985 to Mitchell E. Winegeart (hereafter referenced as "the '576 patent") and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,324,008, issued June 28, 1994 to Giulio Bonetti (hereafter referenced as "the '008 patent"). It is respectfully submitted that the present amendments to the pending claims overcome this rejection for at least the following reasons.

The Examiner indicated in the December 6 Office Action that claim 9 contains allowable subject matter. Accordingly, claims 1, 38, and 40 have been amended to include the subject matter of claim 9. In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that claims 1, 38, and 40 are not obvious in view of the prior art references of record and are allowable.

Since dependent claims 5, 27-28, 36, 29, 41, and 48 are each dependent upon one of independent claims 1, 38, and 40, which are believed to be patentable as set forth above, it is respectfully submitted that the dependent claims are patentable at least by virtue of their dependency, as well as for the separate recitations therein. Accordingly, the allowance of claims 1, 5, 27-28, 36, 38-41, and 48 is respectfully requested.

Claims 14-17 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the '706 patent in view of the '576 patent. It is respectfully submitted that the present amendments to the pending claims overcome this rejection for at least the following reasons.

Claim 15 has been canceled, without prejudice or disclaimer, thus mooting the present rejection with respect thereto.

The Examiner indicated in the December 6 Office Action that claim 18 contains allowable subject matter. Accordingly, claim 14 has been amended to include the subject matter of claim 18. In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that claim 14 is not obvious in view of the prior art references of record and is allowable.

Since dependent claims 16-17 are each dependent upon independent claim 14, which is believed to be patentable as set forth above, it is respectfully submitted that the dependent claims are patentable at least by virtue of their dependency, as well as for the separate recitations therein. Accordingly, the allowance of claims 14 and 16-17 is respectfully requested.

Claim 6 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the '706 patent, the '576 patent, and the '008 patent, and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,884,703, issued March 23, 1999 to Virgilio Garcia-Soule et al. It is respectfully submitted that the present amendments to the pending claims overcome this rejection for at least the following reasons.

Since dependent claim 6 is dependent upon independent claim 1, which is believed to be patentable as set forth above, it is respectfully submitted that the dependent claim is patentable at least by virtue of its dependency, as well as for the separate recitations therein. Accordingly, the allowance of claim 6 is respectfully requested.

II. Allowable Subject Matter

The Applicants gratefully acknowledge the Examiner's indication that claims 9--13, 18, and 30-33 contain allowable subject matter. The Applicants have incorporated the subject matter of claim 9 into independent claims 1, 38, and 40. The Applicants have also incorporated the subject matter of claim 18 (and intervening claim 15) into independent claim 14. It is therefore respectfully submitted that 1, 5-6, 10-14, 16-17, 27-28, 30-33, 36, 38-41, and 4 have been brought into condition for allowance, which is respectfully requested.

III. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, reconsideration and allowance of this application are believed to be in order, and such actions are hereby solicited. If any points remain in issue which the Examiner feels may be best resolved through a personal or telephone interview, the Examiner is kindly requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

Please charge any deficiency or credit any overpayment in the fees for this matter to our Deposit Account No. 20-0090.

Respectfully submitted,

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